

PETITION
OF
SAMUEL L. GOUVERNEUR,

PRAYING

*The aid of government in publishing the manuscript papers of the late
James Monroe, President of the United States.*

JANUARY 3, 1849.

Referred to the Committee on the Library, and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate of the United States :

The petition of Samuel L. Gouverneur,

RESPECTFULLY SETS FORTH :

That James Monroe, fifth President of the United States, departed this life on the 4th of July, 1831; having, by his last testament, constituted your petitioner his sole executor. He confided to his charge a very large mass of manuscripts and papers, collected during his life. They embrace a period of a half century of public service, marked by the progress of great events, in many of which he bore a conspicuous part. The industry and ability with which, at an early age, in the Congress of the confederation, and subsequently, he contributed to the successful vindication of our national right to the free navigation of the Mississippi; and his original resolution and report thereon, urging the several States to invest Congress with the power to regulate commerce, the first step towards the adoption of the present constitution, would alone render a life conspicuous, and his memory dear to the American people.

Of about fifty years spent in the service of his country, ten were devoted to able vindications of our rights and interests in his several missions to France, Great Britain, and Spain. In reference to these, copious notes of daily occurrences, together with a large collection of letters from and to the most distinguished men of this and other countries, are preserved. An extensive collection of correspondence and documents, during the late war, explanatory of its origin, progress, and termination, would afford efficient aid in the future elucidation of its history, and a fair distribution of justice among those who took part therein. Those which illustrate the triple service of Mr. Monroe, at its most gloomy period, in the simultaneous discharge of the duties of the departments of State, Treasury, and War, and the self devotion to country by which it was marked, will acquire merited importance only when an enlightened posterity shall duly estimate the patriotism which at that crisis animated the public councils of the nation. The purity of the principles on which he conducted

the administration of the government during the period of eight years, (so eminently recognised by the people in an unanimous re election to a second term,) though strongly exhibited in the public events of that time, will be but partially developed until History, with all her attendant tributaries, shall have adorned them with their common light. During the comparatively short period from his retirement from the presidential chair to that of his death, with a view to that object, he was occupied in preparing a *memoir of his own times*, and the production of essays, founded on his own experience, calculated to inculcate a just estimate of the invaluable principles of self government, bequeathed to his countrymen by the mighty generation of men among whom his lot had been cast.

Of this mass of matter, he enjoined upon your petitioner the publication of those parts best calculated to present the history of his eventful life, and justify the principles of public policy, by which he and his illustrious associates had been influenced, in their participation in the events which led to the formation of the present government, and their efforts to sustain it in its progress.

Animated by a proper desire to discharge with fidelity the obligation imposed, your petitioner has been for a series of years engaged in the selection of the materials and preliminary arrangements for such a publication. He had secured the prospective aid of others, willing to participate in an enterprise so honorable, and to contribute means to present the result of it in the most attractive form. *The history of the life of James Monroe* would be, if executed on a proper scale, for that period of time, a history, essentially, of the country which gave him birth. In addition to the materials in the possession of your petitioner, he had good reason to rely, in the execution of his project, upon other depositories of a like character, from which, it had been well understood by his testator, that valuable contributions might be drawn. Among these were conspicuous the manuscripts and papers of Jefferson and Madison, intimate political associates and personal friends of James Monroe. Of all of these Congress, by purchase, has acquired the exclusive possession and control. With both, for nearly the whole period of his life, Mr. Monroe maintained relations of great confidential intercourse, and was closely connected by official ties in many important public trusts, both abroad and at home. Such an intercourse led to a constant interchange of intelligence, opinions, and views, resulting in an immense mass of correspondence and documentary history, often the fruits of general contribution, constituting a property of common interest to all. The "manuscripts and papers" of Jefferson and Madison have been, by their respective representatives, deposited in the Department of State. Inaccessible, by rule, to your petitioner or others, their character and references are not yet distinctly known. It seems, however, to be admitted, that many of them are of a character highly confidential, in the publication of which great caution and discretion ought to be observed. In one instance—on the occasion of the necessary forms of transfer—these precautions are said to have been most eloquently enjoined. It is known to your petitioner that many valuable and interesting letters and documents, some of a confidential character, to and from Mr. Monroe, relating to events nearly connected with the history of his life, have been thus transferred to the public charge; of these, many, as originals or copies, are in the possession of your petitioner, and might be, with apparent justice, claimed to be exclusively available to him, in the

publication he has so long had in view. In many cases the manuscripts and papers of all the parties, shedding reciprocal light, are essential to a due appreciation of those of each. Original letters and replies in the hands of either would only accomplish the just objects of publication, under the supervision of a single eye. If a contemplated publication of the manuscripts and papers of Jefferson and Madison should not, in their present shape, fail in rendering complete and full justice to the memories of those distinguished patriots, it is a matter of deep anxiety to your petitioner and his nearest relatives, that it should not result in unexpected but serious injury to that of Mr. Monroe. Such a publication by Congress would be calculated, under existing circumstances, greatly to depreciate the value of the materials in the possession of your petitioner, and, by the destruction of any well-founded hope of realizing profits from the enterprise, would paralyse the exertions of those who are willing to aid it. Your petitioner has not the means to encounter the necessary expenditure, nor the disposition to engage in a work which would be thus overshadowed in its progress by the extensive circulation of a portion of the same materials, and others of the most imposing character, under the immediate patronage of Congress, and at the public charge. Impelled by these considerations, and that sense of duty to his testator which they impose, your petitioner respectfully prays that the Senate will consider the peculiar circumstances of the case, to the end that Congress may be induced to render such aid, either by subscription or otherwise, towards an appropriate publication of all the manuscripts and papers of the late James Monroe, as to your honorable body may appear to be proper and just, or to afford such other relief in the premises as an equitable view of all the facts may suggest.

SAMUEL L. GOUVERNEUR.

WASHINGTON, *January 1, 1849.*

manuscript he has so long had in view. In many cases the manuscript and paper of all the papers showing respect to the subject is a question of those of each. Original papers and copies in the hands of others would only accomplish the first object of publication, and the reproduction of a single copy. It is a contemplated publication of the entire series and papers of Jefferson and Madison should not in their present state, fall in rendering complete and full justice to the interest of those distinguished persons. It is a matter of deep anxiety to your petitioners and their nearest relatives that it should not result in a projected but not a published work. Such a publication by Congress would be calculated under existing circumstances greatly to depreciate the value of the materials in the possession of your petitioners, and by the destruction of any well founded hope of securing protection for the same. They would thereby be deprived of those who are willing to aid. Your petitioners have not the means to encounter the necessary expenditure, nor the disposition to engage in a work which would be less destruction in the progress by the extensive circulation of a portion of the same materials and others of the most important character under the immediate patronage of Congress, and in the public charge. Impeded by these considerations, and that sense of duty to the nation which they impose, your petitioners respectfully pray that the Senate will consider the propriety of the case, in the end that Congress may be induced to render such aid either by subscription or otherwise towards an appropriate publication of all the manuscripts and papers of the late James Madison as to your honorable body may appear to be proper and just, or to effect such other relief in the premises as an equitable view of all the facts may suggest.

SAMUEL L. GOVERNOR

Washington, January 1, 1819.